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ABSTRACT

This report presents the outlines of a unique counseling program offered to freshmen at the University of Notre Dame. The 10 faculty counselors advise and attend to the interests of each student, to help them make a better transition from high school to college. The program emphasizes effective and continuous counseling and testing. Aptitude, interest, and achievement tests are administered throughout the school year, and students are given individual help in their a attempts to meet and conquer the problems of academic life. With no changes in admissions requirements and with the mean SAT scores remaining constant from year to year, the results since the inauguration of the program become increasingly significant: (1) the attrition rate has dropped by 33% per year; (2) there has been an increase in the number of students on the dean's list; (3) there are fewer students dropping courses and withdrawing during the academic year; (4) more students have been assigned to advanced placement and honor courses; and (5) there has been an increase in the number of students allowed to undertake those independent study programs which best fit their abilities. (TA)

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Faculty Counseling -- An Important and Effective Aspect of Student Development

Robert E. Glennen

Introduction

University administrators recognize the importance of an advisory system for entering freshmen students. Various descriptions of faculty advising procedures employed can be found throughout student personnel literature (Hardee 1955, 1959, 1961, Wisenthal 1964, Gelso and Sims 1968). Often these programs exist in name only, as the actual implementation of faculty counseling involves many problems. Moser and Moser (1963) maintain the failure of faculty counseling is due to the following difficulties:

> Faculty develop negative reactions to personnel work.
> Faculty members are reluctant to admit they know little about such things as tests, percentiles and graduation requirements.
> Advising is not a spelled-out part of faculty contracts.
> Many faculty have no talent for personal counseling, and feel threatened by students in any, except a teaching relationship.
> Faculty soon become disenchanted when students do not respond to their friendliest overtures.
> Faculty are overworked and do not have time for advising.
> Faculty do not receive any extra remuneration for advising.

The faculty counselor must feel that his counseling job is important and be fully committed to the task of providing sufficient effort and time to facilitate counseling. Wisenthal (1964) indicates two weaknesses in the advisor-student relationship: (1) is the unwillingness of many faculty members to attach significant importance to their roles in developing a proper counseling relationship; and (2) the counselor does not devote at least the same amount of time to

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this aspect of his work load as he does to a course involving two or three lecture hours a week.

Background of the Program

Six years ago at the University of Notre Dame a committee was formed of faculty members and deans to investigate the possibility of establishing a special Freshman program. There were two major problems which needed to be resolved: (1) an almost inflexible system of handling transfers within the four undergraduate colleges and (2) an admission by quotas for each of these colleges. At that time one-fifth of each graduating class had been transferring from one college to another within the University and the majority of these changes were found to have been effected at the end of the first year of college. The committee further discovered that many freshmen applied for a particular college with little knowledge of its curricular program or because they were ill-advised in selecting a major.

With the knowledge of these transfer problems at Notre Dame, the members of the committee next studied freshman programs at several other colleges and Universities and from these meetings came up with an innovation called The Freshman Year of Studies. In this program, when a student applies to the University, he makes a declaration of intent "of that undergraduate college which he proposes to enter as a sophomore." His final choice of a major is not made until the end of the freshman year. The four intents are: Arts and Letters, Business Administration, Science, Engineering. The curriculum includes English, Mathematics (Calculus), Science, Philosophy, Theology and Social Science electives. Engineering and Science intents take a second laboratory science and a more intensive calculus course in place of Social Science course.

Faculty Counseling

When the program was established, the administration appointed a Dean of Freshmen, with assistant deans and faculty members to provide for the administration and academic guidance of these students. The men appointed as faculty counselors have an average of twenty-three years of college teaching experience and hold the rank of a professor or associate professor in several departments within the four colleges of the University. All these men were experienced professors and were completely aware of academic problems facing freshmen.

As freshmen came in to seek advice, they were able to explain in detail the programs of study that a student would have to face at the sophomore, junior and senior levels; the problems they might encounter in that major; and the possibilities of employment once they had obtained their degrees. These men were not, then, trained counselors. They had never taken courses nor held degrees in counseling, psychology or guidance. So in order to help them develop skills and knowledge of counseling, an in-service program was set up.

In-Service Training

Peters and Shertzer (1963) indicate the major purpose of in-service education is to help each individual to become as competent as he is capable of becoming, and that "programs need to be continuous, adaptive to the group and based on the staff's readiness for change." The in-service devices that were utilized in helping these professor-counselors have been:

1. to hold monthly faculty counselors' meetings.
2. to utilize guest speakers, such as Counselor Educators, Psychologists, and student personnel workers from within the University.
3. to attend various A. P. G. A. national and state meetings.
4. to conduct all day guidance workshops, featuring recognized authorities outside the University.

In-Service Training (cont'd)

5. to show counseling films and discuss their contents.
6. to build up a counseling, vocational-educational guidance library within the office.
7. to conduct case conferences on problem students.
8. to provide group guidance sessions for dissemination of information.
9. to hold special meetings on test interpretation, analysis of data, and use of computers in guidance of freshmen.

The Guidance Program

The ten faculty counselors assigned to the Freshman Year of Studies have duties which promote the following guidance program.

Each summer the Freshman Year receives from the Admissions Office individual files on every student admitted to the University. The counselors investigate the contents of these files-- the student's academic records, his test scores, essential family information, physical and mental health, and any special problem or situation which might be evident from the review of the information contained in these folders A list is then made of these students and they are the first individuals called in for counseling the first few weeks of school.

During the five day Freshman orientation period there is a special meeting in which each student meets with his counselor. The purpose of this meeting is to have an informal opportunity for counselors to begin establishing rapport with their counselees and to explain the various procedures of operation for the Freshman Year of Studies. Generally, counselors will also discuss academic regulations, the grading system, probation, absences and curriculum. The last and a very fruitful part of the meeting, is devoted to answering questions from the students. On the third day of orientation, students take a battery of orientation tests which consist of an achievement test series, personality tests, and

the writing of an autobiography. From the analysis of test scores, autobiographies and personality screening tests, those students who appear to have the most need of immediate attention are then called in for individual counseling sessions. During the first month of school, a special course on "How to Study" is offered to the students one hour a day after their regular classes.

After the first three weeks of school, the Dean of the Freshman Year writes to every parent asking them to send a letter informing him more intimately of their son. As these letters are received and read by the Dean, significant information is underlined, and the letters are referred to the individual counselors to follow up.

Faculty counselors generally make an effort to see each student at least once each semester. The average at the end of the year is approximately four times per student, with the "problem students" ranging anywhere from ten to twenty individual interviews. After the mid-semester grade reports come out, those students who have received mid-term deficiencies, i.e., a D or an F in any subject, meet with the Dean in group sessions and become the focal point of counseling for the remainder of the semester.

During the second semester the counselors concentrate on those students who are on probation or who had low grade point averages for their first semester work. Special efforts are also made to see each Dean's list student to congratulate him on his performance, give him encouragement, and provide him with information on scholarships, special honors courses and independent study programs. At the end of each semester, the freshmen have a special exam schedule whereby they have only one final exam per day.

During the past three years, the Freshman Year of Studies has had a black counselor to handle the special problems related to disadvantaged students. He counsels with them, tests them, gives them vocational-educational information. He also co-ordinates a program of small group tutoring especially established for these boys. Perhaps his most important counseling has been related to assisting them in the areas of personal, social adjustment.

Results

Faculty counselors in the Freshman Year of Studies program give complete attention to the interests of each student and try to help them make a better transition from high school to college. Students are encouraged to take advantage of the comprehensive freshman year guidance program which emphasizes effective and continuous counseling and testing. The office administers aptitude, interest and achievement tests throughout the year. It provides students with individual help in meeting the problems of academic life. It lets them know that there is one person within the complex world of the University who is concerned about them and to whom they can turn when they need advice.

The following results provide evidence that a faculty counseling program can be successful if the faculty are dedicated, interested in helping each student, willing to be open-minded, and subject themselves to in-service training programs in guidance and counseling. However, before discussing the program results, I would like to point out that a scientific approach would have been ideal but it was impossible and improbable to utilize a control group situation. Comparison was made with the freshman program and performance of individuals before the establishment of the Freshman Year of Studies Program. Furthermore, the results will have added significance when one realizes that there were no changes in admissions requirements and the mean S. A. T. scores

remained very constant from year to year. Also, there were no changes in the grading system or the curriculum which would have influenced the results.

The most significant fact is the reduction of the attrition rate by thirty-three percent to 2% per year (approximately 30 are dropped for academic failure). Secondly, there has been an increase in the number of students who have made the Dean's list since the inauguration of this program. Prior to the program eighty-one freshmen or 5% of the entering class made the Dean's list. This has increased to 8% the first year, and a record high of 39% or 605 out of 1530 students with B averages last year. In addition, it has been found that there are fewer students dropping courses and withdrawing during the academic year; class attendance has consistently been excellent; more students have been given advanced placement and honor courses; there has been an increase in the number of students allowed to undertake independent study programs which would best fit their abilities; there has been a reduction in the number of referrals to the Psychological Clinic; and there has been an increase in the number of students who attend summer school. This latter figure is significant because this means the majority of students go into their Sophomore year completely caught up in credits and academic course requirements.

Conclusions

The findings presented indicate that a Freshman Year of Studies program which utilizes faculty counseling can provide concrete academic results. Why has this program worked, when as Moser and Moser (1963) point out, most do not succeed? The reasons I offer are careful organization, concerned leadership and an adequate budget for salaries and guidance materials. Most significant, however, has to be the guidance-oriented point of view of the faculty

members appointed to be counselors. They were allowed to use their subject area expertise in advising students. Guidance was easily accessible in a centralized office. It became convenient for students to get advice without having to run all over campus to see deans or department heads. Faculty counselors gained personal satisfaction from advising students, yet retained their professional standing within their individual disciplines.

Student responses to an evaluation questionnaire indicated overwhelming support of this program. Their replies stated that the best feature of the Freshman Year was the counseling and vocational-educational testing. Their recommendations for improvement called for more counselors and that they be younger men.

Parental attitudes, as reflected in over eight hundred letters to the Dean, revealed that they were very satisfied with the guidance provided and the personal interest shown by faculty counselors and deans. Many pointed out that they had had sons or daughters who attended other colleges and they had not received such individual attention and guidance.

Some of the comments sent in by parents were:

> This is our fourth child to attend college and this is the first time any one has ever shown a personal interest in the individual.
>
> Kevin is our third son to attend a university. Our eldest graduated two years ago from Y University and our second is now a student at the University of X . We never had either University show a concern for the student. Their philosophy seemed to be "learn or get drafted." This philosophy may be one of the contributing causes of student unrest on the campus. Most students feel lost during their freshman year and they need the help and guidance that is provided by your program.

> First, let me say how impressed my wife and I were with the personal interest and guidance you offer to all freshmen at Notre Dame. We both come from homes with an educational background. My father was a principal of a high school and my wife is presently teaching math in a local high school. We have never seen anything like your program. It appears well conceived, unique and actively pursued.

In concluding my report, I would like to restate our position. The Freshman Year of Studies program strives for the college experience to be the beginning of a lifetime of learning, research, discovery and concern. It assists students to understand and accept themselves and gain a new and lasting ability to cope effectively with life. (Carroll and Tyson, 1969). Faculty counseling is an important and effective aspect of student development.

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